

Genesis 37 - The Amazing Story of Joseph

1. What do you know about the story of Joseph?

Genesis is the story of God working through the family of Abraham to rescue the world from sin and death. In Genesis 12:1-3 God promises Abraham that he would become a great nation, possess the land of Canaan and that through him all nations would be blessed. In chapter 37:1 Jacob (aka "Israel", Abraham's grandson) is living in the land of Canaan with his 12 sons. Read chapter 37.

2. Before God's people had the Scriptures or prophets God often spoke to people in through dreams. In v5-11 Joseph has 2 similar dreams. The dream identifies Joseph as the one who, in God's plan, will become the son to whom the rest of the family will bow down. What is the significance of the dream being repeated (see 41:32)?
3. What do we see through this chapter about the character of the different family members? How many different sins, weaknesses or problems can you find?
4. By the end of the chapter what pain and suffering is each character experiencing? On a scale of 1-10 how likely does it look that Joseph's dreams will come true? What about the promises to Abraham?
5. Decades later Joseph becomes ruler of Egypt. A great famine threatens the lives of Jacob and his family. They travel to Egypt and bow down before Joseph, who saves them. Given the beginning in chapter 37, what does the whole story teach us about
 - a. God and his work in the world, even when opposed by sinful men? (See Genesis 50:18-21)
 - b. Our experience of life while God works out his plans?
6. With the benefit of hindsight, in what ways can you see the hand of God at work in the actions and 'coincidences' of chapter 37?
7. In what ways is the story of Joseph similar to that of other great rulers/saviours in the Bible (especially Jesus)? (See Acts 2:22-24 & 4:27-28)
8. How does what we have seen in this study encourage us when
 - a. Life is hard and it feels like God and his promises are a long way from fulfilment?
 - b. God's people (including us!) are sinful, weak and dysfunctional?
 - c. Jesus and his people are hated, rejected and even persecuted?

Genesis 39-41 - The Painful Path to Glory

1. Every Christian experiences trials (things 'refine' or 'prove' our faith) and other forms of temptation to turn away from God. What particular trials & temptations do you find most common or most intense?

2. According to Joseph's dreams (37:5-11), he is destined to rule over God's chosen people. However, before he is exalted as ruler of all Egypt and saves his own family, he experiences unjust suffering and intense temptation for over 10 years. Read chapters 39 & 40.
 - a. In what different ways does the text indicate that God's hand was on Joseph?

 - b. In what different ways was Joseph's faith tested?

 - c. Why do you think Joseph's 'trials' are recorded for us in such detail - why not skip straight to 41:46? What does it teach us about Joseph? What does it teach us about God?

 - d. Read Genesis 41:1-45 & 47:11-12. How did Joseph's trials and temptations prepare him for his future role? What good did God bring out of them?

3. How is the testing and temptation of Joseph similar or different to that of Jesus? What good did God bring from Jesus' being tested? (See Hebrews 2:17-18, 4:14-16 & 5:7-10)

4. We need to be careful in putting ourselves in the shoes of Joseph. He is God's chosen man to save sinful (yet loved) people. In this way Joseph foreshadows Jesus. However, as those "in Christ" who also experience trials and temptations we can also learn from Joseph how to respond when they come (as we know they will!). How do these New Testament passages urge us to think and respond when we are tested? What is more important in God's mind than our comfort and worldly success?

Romans 8:28-30, James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 1:3-7, Hebrews 12:1-13.

5. (Optional) In what ways might sexual temptation come to us? What belief and strategy helped Joseph to resist (see v 9-10)? What might we learn from this? (See also 1 Corinthians 6:18-20)

6. Give thanks that by standing firm in trials and temptation, Jesus has become the source of eternal salvation for us. Pray that God would strengthen you to stand firm so that the trials and temptations you experience will refine your faith and make us more like Jesus.

Genesis 42-47- The People God Changes

1. What do you think are the main barriers that keep people from submitting to Jesus?

In Genesis 37 Joseph's brothers want to kill him, but Judah persuades them to sell him into slavery. In chapter 38 Judah leaves God's family (v 1) and lives a thoroughly pagan life. We see the depths of his moral and spiritual decline. How will God ever keep his promise to bring blessing to the world through this corrupt family? Meanwhile, in Egypt, God prepares and exalts Joseph to be ruler of all Egypt (chapters 39-41). By chapter 42 a great famine (foretold by God through Joseph) has arrived. Now Jacob and his family in Canaan are facing death.

2. In this study we will attempt to let the story itself 'speak to us'. Read one chapter at a time, then for each chapter reflect on the questions below. Start with chapter 42 and read up till chapter 47 – or as far as time allows. Try to make it to at least chapter 46:7. (It might even be fun to appoint a narrator and readers for each character!)

- a. What is surprising in the story?
- b. According to the text, what emotions do the character's experience?
- c. What links can you see with the events of chapter 37? (eg. things that haven't changed, legacies/consequences, fulfilments of Joseph's dream)
- d. In what ways have the characters been changed? How does this seem to have happened?
- e. Are there any statements that seem to be significant for helping us to understand the point of the story? What points do they communicate?

3. Why do you think Joseph puts the brothers through such a 'grinding' before he reveals his identity? What is the effect of this?
4. In what ways does the story as a whole help us to better understand and appreciate how God saves his people (us!) through Jesus?
5. How do these chapters give us hope when it feels like God could/would never save people as sinful as ourselves or others?
6. What should you pray in response to what you have read and discussed?

Genesis 48-50 - The God who makes the Future

1. What do people in our world think it means to “die well”? What would this look like?
2. The final section of the account of Joseph, shows us the death of Jacob and then of Joseph himself. Read chapter 48 & 49:29-33.
 - a. What/where/who is on Jacob’s heart & mind as he faces death?
 - b. What does he know/believe about God?
 - c. What does he look forward to (beyond his death) & on what basis?
3. In chapter 49 Jacob blesses each of his sons. The most significant blessing turns out to be for Judah. Read 49:8-12. How does this anticipate Jesus? (See Matthew 1:1-6 & Revelation 5:5-7). How does seeing Jacob’s words fulfilled in Christ strengthen your faith in God’s promises – even over centuries?
4. Read chapter 50.
 - a. God had promised to take Jacob back to the Promised Land of Canaan (Genesis 46:3-4). Jacob had also ‘commanded’ it (47:30-31, 49:29-31 & 50:12). What do we learn from the record of the elaborate mourning and funeral procession in verses 1-14? (ie. Why is all this recorded for us?)
 - b. As Joseph dies, what does he expect to happen in the future? See what happened in these verses – Exodus 13:19, Joshua 24:32, Hebrews 11:22. What does this teach us about faith in God’s promises?
5. What promises has God made about the future – even after we die? Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. How can we encourage one another so that these promises strengthen our faith in the face of death?
6. (If time permits) After Jacob died, Joseph’s brothers were worried that he (Joseph) would now take revenge on them (v 15). Why do you think Joseph wept when he received his brother’s message (v 17)? What beliefs enabled Joseph to forgive and care for his brothers (v19- 21)? How might these beliefs also help us to respond to people who offend/hurt us? (See Romans 12:16-21).
7. What do we learn from Genesis 48-50 about how to die well?